



# A WOMAN OF WAR



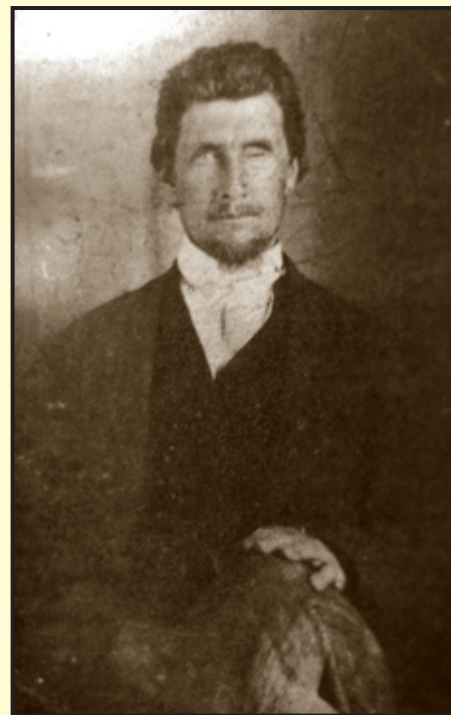
*Sarah Malinda Blalock*



Sarah Malinda Blalock and her husband, William McKesson “Keith” Blalock, lived in Coffey’s Gap on the Watauga and Caldwell County line in 1860. Keith Blalock was an avowed Unionist, but with the passage of the first Confederate conscription act imminent, he enlisted in the 26th North Carolina Infantry on March 20, 1862. He hoped to get close enough to the Union lines to desert. Malinda Blalock enlisted on the same day, concealing her identity as a woman and passing herself off as Sam Blalock, Keith’s younger brother. Once in the army, Keith Blalock concluded that his plan would not work. To obtain a medical discharge (he already had a hernia), he stripped and rolled around in poison oak, developing a rash that made him unfit for service. He was discharged on April 20, as was Malinda Blalock after she revealed her true identity. They returned to the mountains where Keith recovered.



**Sarah M. Blalock** – Courtesy North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill



**William M. “Keith” Blalock** – Courtesy Avery County Historical Society and Museum

Confederate conscription officers soon came calling, driving Keith Blalock into the wilds of Grandfather Mountain, where he began to guide escaped Union prisoners and dissidents from Blowing Rock, across Grandfather Mountain near Shull’s Mill, and into Banner Elk. On June 1, 1864, he enlisted in Co. D, 10th Michigan Cavalry, and continued to scout in the High Country, inciting or participating in several skirmishes in the area and losing an eye. Malinda Blalock may have dressed as a man again and accompanied Keith, but firm evidence has not been found.

After the war ended, the Blalocks moved to Mitchell County briefly before heading to Texas. They later returned to North Carolina and settled south of here in Montezuma. They are both buried in the Montezuma Community Cemetery.